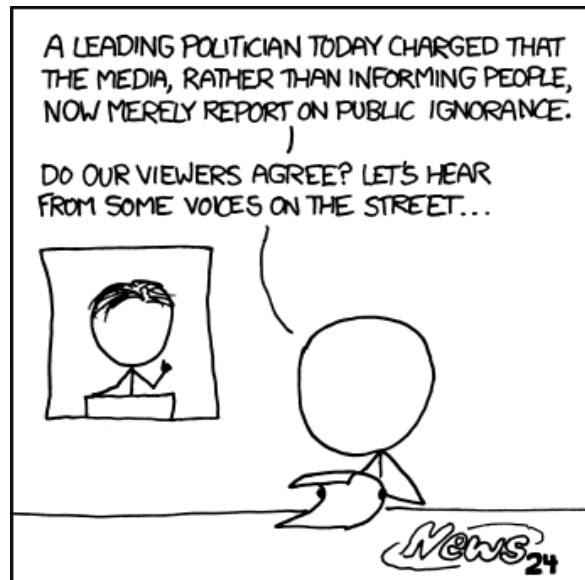


I come to bury the amateur, not to praise him.

Or why we should try and save the professionals.



News networks giving a greater voice to viewers because the social web is so popular are like a chef on the Titanic who, seeing the looming iceberg and fleeing customers, figures ice is the future and starts making snow cones.

[comic strip and comment by xkcd.com]

In 2006 Time magazine decided that YOU was to be awarded “person of the year”. When I first read the editor's leading article I had mixed feelings about it: I could agree on a few of the achievements he claimed were at the base of his choice, but for most part I felt frustrated, or better *disappointed*.

In the first few lines, Richard Stengel says: “the new media age of Web 2.0 is threatening only if you believe that an excess of democracy is the road to anarchy. I don't”.

In this text I am going to do my best to argue that *democracy* is not what the digital revolution led us to, and why YOU is not to be praised at all.

Time magazine, in that renowned issue, goes on explaining the profits of citizen journalism, how undoubtedly “a mother in Baghdad with a videophone can let you see a roadside bombing”.

The World Wide Web made it possible for millions of people to build a *cosmic compendium of knowledge*, people devoting their free time helping one another to make an everyday better Wikipedia and an everyday larger Youtube. With the

easy and accessible tools that the Internet gives us today it is fairly easy to bring together the smallest contributions to improve an encyclopedia entry, work on the source code of a program – all things that in the past required our physical presence now they're not bound to a place anymore.

What we feel is a freeing power- it is a refreshing breeze that smells of change and liberation.

We can know what happens in the world in real time from the direct source: the people themselves. We can judge a book by reviews written on amazon by readers, or hear about election candidates directly from his potential voters: those are people like us, they have energy and passion, we trust them even though they are strangers because they do not yield the awe of the Authority. Car companies are running open design contests and blog posts are taking more and more importance in the world of media, for the imperative is to build “a new kind of international understanding [...] citizen to citizen, person to person”. It is undeniable what this has brought us a matter of insight on what is happening in the world. I come from a country, Italy, where the national news channels and newspapers, most of the time, are not telling “all the truth” about the daily events. Being able to read blogs and see Youtube videos that testified police violence or politicians' corruption has been crucial in the creation of my critical judgment.

Nevertheless, a lot of stress is put on the fact that the web 2.0 revolution is led by ordinary people: hobbyists, diarists and armchair pundits.

They are seen as the army of amateurs challenging the authority of the traditional experts, in a noble fight à la David versus Goliath- except Davids are thousands of millions, and Goliath is about to fall.

What they want to achieve is an extreme form of democracy where everybody is allowed to broadcast their voice, and every voice is weighed the same.

Those who defend this kind of radical egalitarianism would argue that putting every source next to each other, regardless of the authority it has, makes the talented stand out from the crowd. On the other hand, the system of values with which authority has been established, is what our society engineered to filter the *noise* in the stream of informations.

Since everybody has a say in every field, it suddenly takes an incredible amount of time to discern what is relevant information from what is not; doing so disregarding the expertise of professional who received a lifetime of training seems irrational, at best.

Goliath is scared, and for a good reason: millions of bloggers are threatening the jobs of a handful of hundreds of paid journalists and experts in various fields.

Those employed professionals are receiving money in exchange of their knowledge and skill, knowledge that requires fostering and nurture, they are one of the many expressions of our highly specialized society: claiming that kind of proficiency is no longer required corresponds to disregard the pillars of higher education itself.

The Scholar, the Expert are what we nowadays consider reliable sources of information because of their studies; the news channels and the newspapers we consider reliable sources as well, because their integrity is at stake every time they make a statement: their editorial staff takes the responsibility that comes with distributing information, years have been devoted to building their credibility.

In a world in which audience and author are getting more and more close the army of amateurs is threatening, with the praise of the participatory media, the concept of Authorship, and in the end Authority itself.

In its original meaning, *Auctoritas* (from *augeo*, to augment, to make prosper) refers to the various qualities of an institution or person to whom the individual voluntarily submits to in order to fulfill communal objectives.

It does not include the concept of power – *Auctoritas* is the legitimate respect given to the honest man who earned it.

The concept has shifted in the ages and may now have acquired also negative meanings but demand radical democracy rejecting Authority in information, if not anarchy, it is something very close.

We are in danger of falling into what A. Keen in his book “the Cult of the Amateur” calls “the law of digital Darwinism: the survival of the loudest and the more opinionated. Under these rules the only way to intellectually prevail is by infinite filibustering”.

Another point of view for the situation comes from examining the imperative that Web 2.0 society announces: participate, share, upload.

In the pre-Industrialized era, that we could call in a way “traditional”, the product of labour was non-alienated, handcrafted commodities; everybody had a fixed role in the community life.

Surveillance and supervision were a duty of the elderly in the family, and the neighbour.

After the Industrial revolution these premises change, the Fordist society work is highly alienated and physically linked to a time and a fixed space; “a more generalized form of mutual surveillance is replaced by segmented and hierarchical structures of monitoring”.*

How does this change again in the mass-media-driven, post-Fordist society? There's a need to rationalize the “impersonal marketplace”, enormous quantities of various goods are produced, and advertising is there to ensure that their consumption is on a balanced scale.

Society is constantly retraining both workers and consumers in the use of interactive technologies, a firm division between mental and material labour is established, which deeply characterizes the mass society.

That's where what Mark Andrejevic calls a "digital revolution" comes into play: "the promise of the *digital revolution* [...] is to free us from the rigid spatial and temporal boundaries associated with the rationalization of modern society: the demarcation of the work day and of spaces of leisure, domesticity, consumption, production." Those divisions do not matter anymore because the technological tool allows us "customize our working condition according to our personal preferences".

But that kind of flexibility is a double edged weapon: the collapsing distance between work and leisure on one hand, associated with interactive and online forms of consumption, and the slow merging of work and daily life on the other, transform the rhythm of daily life into a value-generating activity by virtue of the fact that they can be monitored.

The form of surveillance that once was part of the community life now is expressed in the need of "watch and being watched".

It is a perfectly understandable human instinct, one of inspecting our surroundings and at the same time reach out to be seen: that kind of monitored activity, closely observed by the corporations and marketing companies, is the same that the amateur culture is prompting us to endure.

Share, at any cost, whatever is it that we want to share. All information is valuable, in the end.